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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003242

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [SO](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: AFRICOM COMMANDER AND PRIME MINISTER MELES DISCUSS
SOMALIA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary. Visiting USAFRICOM commander General William E. Ward met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on November 21 to reinforce AFRICOM's relationship with Ethiopia, and to discuss regional dynamics. Meles, focused primarily on Somalia, said the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) lacked leadership. He envisioned two scenarios for the near-term in Somalia. First, the TFG could be quickly reconstituted with the formation of a unity government with help from the international community, but Meles thought this scenario was increasingly unlikely. For the second and more likely scenario, Meles thought it was probable that Ethiopia would withdraw from Somalia recognizing that the TFG had failed, and that there was no feasible political alternative to the TFG. Meles promised that Ethiopia would not leave the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers behind, and he requested assistance from the United States and the international community to facilitate AMISOM's withdrawal. Meles hoped that AMISOM and the Ethiopian military could be out of Somalia by the end of January. For the immediate future, Meles looked to the InterGovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) summit in December to decide the TFG's fate. End Summary.

AFRICOM-Ethiopian Relationship Ready to Move Forward

12. (C) General Ward opened the meeting by briefing Prime Minister Meles on the current status of AFRICOM, reaffirming that AFRICOM was committed to moving its relationship with Ethiopia forward. Meles responded that he was "extremely pleased" with the bilateral military to military relationship, and he was confident that the relationship would continue to remain strong.

The TFG Lacking in Leadership

13. (C) Meles continued that although Ethiopia lived in a "tough neighborhood," Somalia was Ethiopia's most immediate challenge. Meles lamented that the TFG suffered from a severe lack of leadership, and noted that the TFG had failed to capitalize on new opportunities to resolve Somalia's political and security problems. He said he did not see a cohesive and committed TFG. Meles opined that it was still possible to reconstitute the TFG, although not necessarily with the current leadership, if a deal was struck quickly, and the new unity government was sufficiently "inclusive." Meles stressed while it was still possible to fix the TFG, it was increasingly unlikely because its leaders, clearly

referring to President Yusuf, were working hard to prevent a unity government at the expense of the TFG and Somalia.

Two Scenarios for Somalia

14. (C) Meles explained that he saw two possible scenarios for Somalia at this point. First, he said, the TFG could be quickly reconstituted. If this happened, Ethiopia would be less eager to withdraw from Somalia entirely. He said Ethiopia might be able to leave Mogadishu, allowing the TFG and a peacekeeping force to secure the city, and focus on security in other areas of Somalia, particularly the south. He cautioned, however, that the window for this scenario was closing. He saw little reason to believe that the nature of the TFG would change from what they have shown in the previous years. He also said the international community would need to rapidly respond, but he noted that the United Nations was over stretched with peacekeeping missions, and unwilling to become involved in Somalia.

15. (C) More likely, Meles said, Ethiopia would withdraw from Somalia recognizing that there was no feasible political alternative to the failed TFG, and "see what happens." Meles stated Ethiopia would establish a "security corridor" along the Ethiopian border inside Somalia by developing clan alliances in that area and working with local allies. Meles inferred that the groundwork for this strategy was already underway. Ethiopian troops positioned on the border, but inside Ethiopia, would conduct raids and other operations as necessary inside Somalia. At the same time, Ethiopia would

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continue to work with Somaliland and Puntland to use them to limit extremist activity and reach.

AMISOM Needs U.S. and International Assistance to Withdraw

16. (C) Turning to AMISOM, Meles asked for U.S. and international assistance to facilitate the peacekeeper's withdrawal from Somalia. Meles said the key challenge for an Ethiopian withdrawal will be how to get AMISOM out of Somalia. He said Ethiopia had assured both the Ugandans and the Burundians that Ethiopia would not leave the peacekeepers behind. Ugandan President Museveni had suggested that AMISOM withdraw overland in concert with the Ethiopian troops as they pulled back to Ethiopia, but Meles said he told Museveni that AMISOM should leave by sea and air as they had first deployed to Mogadishu. He noted that it was too complicated for the Ethiopian military to escort AMISOM out by land. Meles said Ethiopian troops would stay in Somalia long enough to cover AMISOM's departure.

Timing for an Ethiopian Withdrawal?

17. (C) In response to General Ward's query on the timeline for withdrawal, Meles said he hoped that AMISOM could be out of Somalia by mid-January so that the Ethiopian military could redeploy to Ethiopia by the end of January. Meles added what happens after that was greater challenge. Somalia's "jihadist corps" was mobilizing to take control of all of Somalia, but Meles did not think they would be able to manifest themselves as they did in 2006. Meles predicted that they would no longer be able to act as a monolithic entity, rather new clan alliances would limit the jihadist's influence. Meles was also concerned that the jihadists might become involved in piracy, and he feared what that might mean for Ethiopia and the region at large.

Ethiopia's Next Steps

18. (C) Meles said for the next few weeks he would continue to build consensus within IGAD regarding the TFG. Meles said

IGAD will meet again in December to judge the TFG's progress.

Meles admitted that he been trying to influence the Somalia political process through IGAD, but that some in IGAD, including Djibouti, were overly optimistic. Meles said by December IGAD will have seen the outcome of the Djibouti process. If, as he expected, nothing will have been accomplished by the TFG then the decision will be easy, "there will be nothing to be done except to withdraw."

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